

FROM THE FIELD

How Best-Practice Public Administration is Quietly Transforming Victoria*

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Drawing on interviews with nine Victorian Fellows of the Institute of Public Administration Australia, this article documents examples of successful public sector reforms in Victoria. Examples include the following: a reduction in road fatalities, a reduction in household water consumption, securing Melbourne's liveability despite significant population growth, service and infrastructure delivery, and improved collaboration aimed at addressing family violence and emergency management. The interviews also pointed to promising early commissioning work, designing and creating new markets. Bipartisan support was common to most of the examples, which involve both market and non-market approaches. The reforms documented in this article make it clear that public servants are contributing to making Victoria a better place.

Key words: *Victoria, public administration, public servants, reform, collaboration, commissioning*

The biggest reforms to government shape the way we live, how our economy operates, and how we think of ourselves. They are written up in the history books and seared into our collective memories as the spoils of epic political battles fought and won. Whether it is the Goods and Services Tax, refugee policy, or the carbon price, we think of them not just as reforms to the government but as the products of a contest for the future of the country.

Yet the quiet work of best-practice public administration can be just as transformational, particularly when viewed with a longer term perspective. This type of reform makes the headlines only sometimes, and is often implemented with bipartisan support across changes in the government, over an extended period. It is this type of reform that is the subject of this article.

Public servants do not secure a lot of credit for the work they do or the way in which they help society, nor do they generally seek it. In a Westminster system of government, reforms are rightfully sold and defended by ministers. Public sector leaders by their nature are focussed on the challenges and opportunities ahead, rarely satisfied as they strive towards the ever-elusive goal of policy perfection.

The public does not have a good understanding of the work of public administrators. When the media does focus on public servants, it is often a tabloid focus on expense claims or corruption allegations. Where public servants are shown in popular culture – for example *The Hollowmen*, *The Thick of It*, *Utopia* – they are depicted as dim-witted and slow.

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Yet contemporary public administration is far more sophisticated than it is given credit for, and governments are full of driven, intelligent, highly educated people. Public administration today involves engagement with markets, complex partnerships with the private and not-for-profit sectors, and insights from behavioural economics. Collaboration is a core public administration skill, and ‘big data’ and geospatial information are becoming increasingly important public sector tools.

To shed light on the work of public servants in Victoria, this article seeks to document those policy areas in which best-practice public administration is making Victoria a better place. The analysis is informed by interviews conducted with nine Fellows from the Institute of Public Administration (IPAA) Victoria. Interviewees were selected on the basis that they were still practising and had been awarded a Victorian Fellowship only recently. This ensured the interviewees were able to present perspectives on the contemporary practice of public administration in Victoria.

All interviewees were asked for their reflections on three key questions:

- (1) In which areas do you think current public administration practice is making a big difference?
- (2) What are the most important advances in public administration to have occurred over the past 10 years?
- (3) In which areas do you think current practice – while possibly in its early stages – is at the cutting edge of public administration?

Common themes were identified from the interviews, and desktop analysis was then conducted to further investigate the items identified by the interviewees. This ensured that the perspectives of the interviewees could be presented alongside the relevant background and history. It also enabled claims made by interviewees to be cross-checked against relevant data.

It is clear that not everything undertaken by the government ends up being a success. The main sentiment emerging from many of

the interviewees was a sense of frustration at the lack of progress within government – of reform potential not yet realized. Most interviewees were not inclined to claim success for the government just yet, and were looking intently towards the future. Nevertheless, the stories told during the interviews reveal an impressive catalog of achievements for public administration in Victoria.

Transformations

The following section summarizes the key achievements highlighted by the interviewees. These include successes in behaviour change, securing Melbourne’s liveability, delivering services and infrastructure, and collaboration across government. The final part of this section also outlines promising early work in the design and creation of new markets.

Behaviour Change

Achieving sustained behaviour change is notoriously difficult and complex (APSC 2007). Yet a majority of the interviewees pointed to a track record of governments successfully using a range of tools to modify the behaviour of Victorians in the public interest. Two successes were highlighted as particularly good examples: a reduction in road fatalities and a reduction in household water consumption.

Fewer road fatalities

In 1970, Victoria’s road toll peaked at more than 1000 fatalities (DOJ 2014). The concern about Victoria’s rising road toll led to Victoria becoming the first jurisdiction in the world to introduce mandatory seatbelts (1971) and random breath testing (1976) (VicRoads 2014). Victoria’s road toll steadily declined from this peak; and by the 1980s, there were about 400 road fatalities in Victoria each year (VicRoads 2014), or about 3 fatalities per 10000 registered vehicles (MUARC 2013).

Since the 1980s, Victoria has pursued further world-leading reforms, including compulsory bicycle helmets (1990), random drug testing (2006) (DOJ 2014; VicRoads 2014)

and mandatory electronic stability control for new vehicles (2011; VicRoads 2011). Together with other reforms such as ‘red light cameras’ (1983), mobile speed cameras (1985), and reduced urban speed limits (2001/02) (DOJ 2014), these changes have had a decisive and dramatic effect.

These reforms involved contributions from a large number of agencies. One interviewee argued the success of the reforms was due to a:

Very well defined target, that’s relatively easy to quantify and calculate, and something that the community can relate to fairly easily . . . that has also made it much easier for the various parties to cut through on issues and work out differences.

Underpinning these reforms was the establishment in 1986 of the Transport Accident Commission (TAC), which provides a no-fault compensation scheme for people who are injured or die as a result of road accidents (TAC 2014). It is known for its hard-hitting public education campaigns emphasizing the personal costs of dangerous driving. By contributing to a reduction in road trauma, the TAC reduces the amount it needs to pay out in insurance claims.

Another interviewee argued that:

The TAC was established with an end-to-end responsibility – everything from preventing the accidents happening in the first place, through to looking after people who have been injured in a transport accident . . . It’s the right institutional structure with the right risk and reward built into that structure.

This work has been impressive. It has been sustained over decades and has made a real difference to the safety of Victorians. Despite there now being an additional million vehicles registered in Victoria (AAA 2014), over the past 5 years the number of road fatalities has been fewer than 300; and in 2010 there were just 0.7 fatalities per 10000 registered vehicles, the lowest of all Australian jurisdictions (BITRE 2012: ii). After adjusting for the increase in the number of vehicles, it means the likelihood of dying on Victoria’s roads has declined by about 75% since the 1980s.

Reduced household water consumption

With droughts becoming longer and more severe (CSIRO and BOM 2014), and Melbourne’s population projected to grow to nearly 8 million by 2051 (DTPLI 2014a), using water more efficiently is an important public policy objective. Melbourne’s daily residential water consumption averaged 423 litres per person in the 1990s and was still 247 litres per person in 2000–01 (DSE 2007: 13).

With the onset of drought, water restrictions were imposed on users from 2002 to drive changes in behaviour. Melbourne reached stage 3a restrictions in 2007 (Melbourne Water 2014a), which limited the watering of gardens, washing of vehicles, and filling of pools. Complementing restrictions was a focus on increasing the recycling of water as well as a range of efficiency measures such as water-efficient buildings and appliances, pricing to encourage prudent use, and rebates for water-saving products (DSE 2007: 25). These measures were further supported by marketing informed by the principles of behavioural economics, such as the ‘Target 155’ program (Ker 2011) that encouraged water users to lower their daily consumption to less than 155 litres.

By 2010–11, daily water consumption had reduced to 147 litres per person, 40% less than 2000–01 (City West Water 2013: 2). Without this reduction in consumption, Melbourne’s water supply would have run dry (OLV 2014a).

One interviewee suspected people had changed their behaviour not just to save money, but also because they had been acting in the public interest. Indeed, evidence suggests that ‘water saving became the social norm while wasting water was repositioned as widely unacceptable’ (Liubinas and Harrison 2012: 5). Another interviewee concluded that:

the drop in [water] demand over the last decade has been pretty impressive . . . the fact that we’ve been able to have permanent water savings as a new normal has been a huge shift . . . The ability to get down to household level for practice change has been pretty impressive.

With the breaking of the drought, restrictions were back to stage one by the end of 2011 (limiting the use of daytime garden irrigation

and the use of water to clean driveways etc.) and a decision was made to keep restrictions at this level permanently (OLV 2014b). Impressively, water consumption has remained subdued even after the drought broke and water restrictions were lifted. Water consumption in 2012–13 was 161 litres per person (Melbourne Water 2013: 11), still 35% less than in 2000–01 or 62% less than in the 1990s.

Melbourne's Liveability

Between 2006 and 2011, Melbourne grew by more people than any other city in Australia (368372), and the average annual growth rate was 1.9% (DTPLI 2013a).

The success of Melbourne dates back to the work of one of Melbourne's early public servants, Robert Hoddle, the surveyor who designed Melbourne's street grid in the 1830s (Museum Victoria 2014). Since then, Melbourne has had a long history of strategic planning – with 21 policies or plans produced since 1954 (DTPLI 2013b), the latest being *Plan Melbourne* (DTPLI 2014b) released in 2014.

The liveability of Melbourne is a function not just of strategic planning, but of a relatively low crime rate, quality service delivery, functional infrastructure, and plenty of recreational activities. This has all required consistent effort by governments over decades. One interviewee said that 'over the last 20 or 30 years, Victoria has been ahead of the pack in terms of the way it has a fairly well thought out strategy and good implementation behind it'. Consequently, it does not seem unreasonable to argue, as another did, that 'the fact that Melbourne is one of the world's most liveable cities is largely the consequence of excellent public policy'.

The success of Victoria in accommodating growth is due to the complementary roles played by the state and local governments. One interviewee argued that 'the overall strategies, through processes and interactions are reasonably well aligned – between departments and tiers of governments'. Another agreed and said that success was due to 'recognition of the different roles that different parts of government play'.

Melbourne is clearly coping well with its growth. In 2014, the Economist Intelligence Unit crowned Melbourne as the 'World's Most Liveable City' for the fourth straight year (EIU 2014). With positive net interstate migration and substantial net overseas migration, Melbourne continues to draw people from elsewhere (ABS 2014). As one interviewee said, 'people are voting with their feet.'

Service and Infrastructure Delivery

A majority of the interviewees pointed to service and infrastructure delivery as significant achievements for public administration in Victoria, with one arguing that 'we lead the nation – or are near the top of the nation – in most areas of public service provision ... and in some areas we are well regarded globally'. Another pointed in particular to the efficiency with which Victoria delivers its services, noting that 'more often than not, we achieve better outcomes [than other states] ... and we do it more efficiently'.

The efficiency and effectiveness of Victoria's service delivery are built on decades of reform. This includes the introduction of activity-based funding for public hospitals in the 1990s (DH 2014), youth justice diversion programs (DHS 2013), and the funding of Victorian government's schools based on actual student enrolments (i.e. the funding follows the student) introduced in 2005 (DEECD 2014). The 2014 *Report on Government Services* found Victoria's performance was either at or exceeding the national average across most service areas, whereas spending was lower than other jurisdictions. For example, Victoria's expenditure per student in government schools is the lowest (PC 2014: 4.36), whereas student performance in reading, writing, and numeracy is equal to – or better than – every other Australian jurisdiction except the ACT (PC 2014: 4.49–4.75). Similarly, Victoria spends the lowest amount per person on policing (PC 2014: 6.12) and the rate of detention of young people is the lowest in the country (PC 2014: 16.6), but it has crime rates broadly comparable to – or lower than – other jurisdictions (PC 2014: 6.31–6.42).

According to a number of interviewees, Victoria is also ‘at the cutting edge of [infrastructure] financing techniques’. Victoria has a long history of innovation in infrastructure financing, dating back to 1978 with the introduction of tolls on the Westgate Bridge (DTF 2014: 11). Since then, Victoria has developed an increasingly sophisticated approach to ‘public-private partnerships’ (PPPs). Although there are certainly mixed views about the benefits of PPPs (e.g. Barratt 2003; Duckett 2013), the Department of Treasury and Finance has identified a number of qualitative benefits arising from the use of PPPs – including innovation in design, additional scope, and complementary development (DTF 2012: 7).

As an example of a successful PPP, one interviewee pointed to Peninsula Link (Frankston Bypass), which was constructed as a PPP under an availability model with no charges to users. This involved the private sector designing, constructing, financing, operating, and maintaining the road, in exchange for regular payments from the state (LMA 2010). In 2013, the project opened ahead of schedule.

A number of interviewees highlighted the Regional Rail Link, which is a major new rail line running through Melbourne’s western suburbs. At \$4–5 billion, it is the largest transport project in Australia and is being constructed using a project-specific Regional Rail Link Authority. The project was segmented into six contracts that stimulated competitive pressures in the private sector, with the Authority driving a collaborative project culture and creating an environment for innovative design and delivery. In 2014, the Regional Rail Link project was awarded ‘Infrastructure Project of the Year’ by Infrastructure Partnerships Australia. At the time of writing, the project was well under budget and on track to be delivered ahead of time (IPA 2014).

Collaboration

Responses to complex social problems ‘increasingly demand complex, knowledge-intensive collaboration between government departments and the community’ (Wear 2007: 20). Collaboration, defined broadly, is ‘more

than one party within the public sector or within and beyond the public sector working together in the areas of policy development, service design or service delivery’ (Nous Group 2013: 3).

In recent years, collaboration has become an important public sector skill, and most of the interviewees pointed to examples of collaboration as areas in which government is making a difference. This section provides information on two key examples: family violence and emergency management.

Family violence

A number of interviewees raised the substantial progress that had been made in ‘getting serious’ about family violence, and in particular the effective collaboration between agencies. One pointed to efforts over the last decade aimed at addressing family violence as ‘one of the single-most collaborative exercises I’ve been involved with in government’. Another also raised the extent of engagement by responsible government organizations, noting ‘the difference between Victoria Police now and Victoria Police then is palpable in terms of treating it as a serious issue, encouraging reporting, responding in a more serious way’.

These efforts have resulted in updates to the Victoria Police Code of Practice for responding to and investigating family violence (Victoria Police 2014) and the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*, which provides for family violence intervention orders and family violence safety notices. A whole-of-government strategy to address family violence was released in 2012 (DHS 2012).

The interviewees agreed significant progress had been made, with one noting that ‘we actually have a system where people who are in danger and afraid are [now] reporting that to police’. Nevertheless, there is still some way to go in terms of effectively preventing or addressing family violence, with another arguing that:

We’ve had a dedicated focus for some time now on responding to family violence. The challenge for policy makers remains how to identify what works in prevention and early intervention. We

need to keep making progress in this area, and that's facilitated by the stronger collaboration we now have in place.

Another agreed, arguing that 'we have a responsive system in which police, courts and services work pretty well together, end-to-end. How we work together with the community to stem the tide of family violence, that's our collective longer term challenge'.

Emergency management

Many of the interviewees identified effective collaboration as a core improvement to Victoria's emergency management capability. One highlighted the significant reform that had occurred over time:

The change from single agencies operating as single agencies to then to the emergency services model, to then the move to emergency management ... it continues to be reform and it's constant.

Following Victoria's devastating Black Saturday bushfires in 2009 and significant floods in 2010–11 and 2012, the Victorian government released a white paper on emergency management (Victorian Government 2012), which signalled a move towards an 'all hazards, all agencies' approach. Although the proposed actions are extensive, covering all facets of emergency management, it is noteworthy that a significant portion of the report is devoted to collaboration (pp. 16–27), with a focus on 'networked arrangements accompanied by an obligation to participate' (p. 16).

A new State Crisis and Resilience Council has been established for the purposes of 'developing and coordinating policy and strategy across the emergency management spectrum and overseeing its implementation' (p. 18). The 'all hazards, all agencies' approach is evident, as the council – or its precursor body – has overseen responses to crises as diverse as the 2009 influenza pandemic and the 2013 Hazelwood mine fire and its aftermath. One interviewee pointed to the breadth of thinking that this collaborative approach brings:

We get full participation, everyone's valued in what they do, and we actually encourage that it's

not just about the sand bags or the fire. We're trying to say, what does it mean for tourism?

The broader approach is also evident with the creation of the Emergency Management Commissioner, heading up a new agency called Emergency Management Victoria charged with embedding a 'collaborative and interoperable approach' (Victorian Government 2012: 21).

Commissioning

Almost all respondents pointed to examples of the commissioning of government services. The term 'commissioning' has only recently begun to gain currency in Australian public administration. It is often misunderstood, and is a much broader concept than procurement. Sturges (2012: 16) describes commissioning as 'the design and creation of new markets and the ongoing management and development of those markets', built on research of 'the entire service chain, to understand where external providers can most appropriately be involved' and 'taking into account wider ... issues such as workforce planning'. Although the term might be new, Victoria clearly has significant experience in the practice of commissioning.

Nevertheless, there are a range of views and commissioning is subject to substantial criticism. Although major advances have been made in the commissioning of services, it seems reasonable to argue, as one interviewee did, that 'we're not there yet'. The following section outlines three examples of commissioning in practice: vocational education and training, natural resources, and disability insurance.

Vocational education and training

In 2009, the Victorian government introduced the 'Victorian Training Guarantee' that guaranteed students a government subsidy in the course of their choice, provided they were 'upskilling'. As part of these reforms, the funded training market was opened up to private providers (DIIRD 2008). Funding now follows the student, and providers must compete to attract students and funding (DIIRD 2008). Subsequent changes have included an uncapping of the fees that can be charged to students

(DEECD 2012: 6), the elimination of remaining block funding to technical and further education (TAFE) institutes (DEECD 2012: 7), and modifications to subsidy rates for particular courses (DEECD 2012: 6; Hall 2013).

Between 2008 and 2013, the number of government-subsidized enrolments increased by 69% (DEECD 2013: 1–2). Furthermore, there has been an increase in training in areas critical to the Victorian economy. Government-subsidized enrolments in ‘in-shortage’ occupations increased by 123% between 2008 and 2013, and enrolments in ‘specialized’ occupations increased by 60% (DEECD 2013: 3). The ‘real recurrent expenditure per hour of load pass’ has decreased year on year, and is the lowest of any Australian jurisdiction (PC 2014: 5.33). As one interviewee argued:

It’s a clever way to use a market to make a system more responsive. We’re training more people, we’re providing more courses through more outlets than ever before. We’re spending more money at a lower unit cost.

There are a range of views on these market-based reforms, and there are clearly some issues that have emerged – meaning it is probably too early to claim success. With no cap on the number of subsidized places available, containing government spending has been difficult. Perhaps not surprisingly, private providers have been extraordinarily nimble and have responded rapidly to the government’s price signals. To militate against perverse outcomes, government has had to closely monitor market behaviour and regularly adjust market settings.

Furthermore, many of the publicly owned TAFE institutions have struggled to compete in a competitively neutral market setting. In 2008, TAFEs and dual-sector universities accounted for 66% of government-subsidized enrolments. By 2013, almost half (48%) of government-subsidized enrolments were delivered by the private sector and the combined TAFE share had declined to 40% (DEECD 2013: 6). Seven TAFEs recorded an operating deficit in 2013, and the Victorian auditor general has assessed the financial sustainability of five TAFEs as high risk (VAGO 2014). The Victorian

government is now providing funding to support TAFEs to become financially sustainable.

Water markets

Historically, the right to water was associated with the control of land – if you owned or leased the land, you had an entitlement to water. However, from 2007, water rights began to become unbundled from land. Surface water associated with regulated rivers is now traded independently of land (NWC 2011: 84). According to one interviewee:

Setting up water markets has been a huge innovation, across both sides of politics. We set up whole new water markets in the last decade. We unbundled water rights from land and there has been continuity of policy.

Water can now flow to where it can be put to best use. Economic modelling has shown that in 2008–09 (at the peak of drought), ‘water trading was vital for the rice, dairy and horticulture industries during the drought’ (NWC 2011: 102) as:

Limited water moved from producers with flexible irrigation demands to those with inflexible demands, including those who own long-lived perennial horticultural assets. The movement of water was complemented by a compensating flow of payments in the other direction. (NWC 2011: 102)

The same research found water trading between irrigators in the southern Murray Darling Basin region increased Australia’s gross domestic product by \$220 million, and that all states benefitted (NWC 2011: 101).

Disability insurance

A number of the interviewees highlighted Victoria’s role in pioneering disability insurance with a model that ultimately led to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). One said that ‘the NDIS were actually ideas ... first tested in Victoria – individual care packages and that sort of thing’. Another elaborated further:

We’ve been pioneers in reforming disability. The concept of individual packages for people with a disability is something Victoria’s been doing

for seven years now – maybe 10 years. Moving from a block-funded agency model to handing out individual packages and letting people choose their services has been something that Victoria has been doing more and more of. It has had bipartisan support over that time.

Through ‘individual support packages,’ funds are allocated to a person ‘to meet their disability-related support needs’ (DHS 2014a). These funds can then be used to buy a range of support services chosen by the person. This model means people with disabilities have control over their own support, and it acknowledges every person has unique support needs. In practice, it means disability support providers have to tailor services to meet individual needs, respond nimbly to the requests and preferences of people with a disability, and run business-focussed organizations (DHS 2008). As one of the interviewees said, this is ‘the model that the NDIS has adopted’.

However another interviewee sounded a note of caution about the NDIS:

Once upon a time, we started with a similar story in another area, and it was called employment services . . . it was about getting bureaucracy out of the way, it was about expert providers . . . individual choice, people with complex needs and so on. The echoes of that in NDIS are remarkable.

15 years down the track, we have a homogenised product basically, choice not exercised. The compliance in that model has killed it. I see the same story around the NDIS and I see all the same risks.

At the time of writing, more than 3000 clients in Victoria’s Barwon region had transitioned to the NDIS, and the program will ultimately roll out across Victoria from July 2016 (DHS 2014).

Discussion

A feature common to most of the reforms highlighted in this article was at least a degree of bipartisan support. However, the direction of causation is not always clear. Did bipartisanship enable the reform to succeed? Or was bipartisan support a product of the reform’s success? The interviewees themselves were of diverse view

when it came to the question of bipartisanship. According to one interviewee:

Commitment from government is really important. If it’s a really huge reform like NDIS you need more bipartisanship, but not all reform requires bipartisanship.

Another argued that quality policy generally prevails throughout changes in government:

What I’ve experienced in natural resource policy is that if there’s good policy underneath, about 85 percent of the policy doesn’t change, maybe 90 percent of the policy. The language does, and there might be a slight change in focus, but all the reforms that this organisation have supported in, say, the Murray Darling Basin, have not changed significantly.

Nevertheless, to claim that public administration plays a key – if not central – role in driving and promoting policy reform is not to argue that politics does not matter. There are of course, big policy divides, real contests for ideas, built on real differences in values. The heat associated with recent national debates over emissions trading, same-sex marriage, and the National Broadband Network are evidence of this.

A theme running through many of the reform achievements highlighted in this article is the role of market mechanisms. From PPPs in infrastructure through to individual support packages for people with a disability, market models have been central to many of the key reforms. This emerging focus on the commissioning of services points to the way forward for public administration in Victoria. This is underlined by one of the interviewees:

The commissioning debate is different [to neoliberalism], and is far more sophisticated. Commissioning is the harder intellectual discipline of going beyond output to outcome. Neoliberalism was comfortable with output, because neoliberalism was a kind of commercial ideology grafted onto the public sector. I think what we’re striving for now is something more sophisticated.

Similarly, another interviewee points to the intersection of public, private, and non-profit as the point that will be most interesting in years ahead:

We've . . . taken a really long time to get past this notion that things are public or private, and it's in there that we're going to see the most fascinating, the most interesting developments over the next decade. There will be some spectacular failures, but we already live in that world.

Nevertheless, there were also examples of success in using non-market approaches. Reducing household water consumption, securing Melbourne's liveability, and reforms to family violence have shown modern public administrations also need to be able to influence public behaviour, regulate effectively, and collaborate across government.

Conclusion

The research associated with this article has revealed a paradox at the heart of public administration in Victoria. For the most part, senior public servants revealed themselves to be extraordinarily future-focussed and dissatisfied with the rate of progress. It was generally difficult to steer interviewees away from a meditation on the challenges ahead for public administration. Yet when interviewees did turn their focus to achievements, they revealed an impressive catalog of accomplishments that have undoubtedly contributed to making Victoria a better place.

The efforts of public servants in Victoria have made Victoria's roads far safer, reduced household water consumption, and secured Melbourne's liveability. Their efforts have delivered Victorians quality services and infrastructure. Huge inroads are being made in tackling family violence and improving emergency management. Victoria's vocational education and training system has expanded and become more responsive, and innovative new approaches to land management have been introduced. Victoria's pioneering efforts in disability support have become the model for the NDIS. There can be no doubt Victorian public servants should be proud to work in public administration.

There are limitations to this analysis of course. For every policy success there are other reform efforts that stalled, misfired, or simply

did not work. This article has not sought to argue that all reform efforts have been successful. Rather, it has attempted to shine light on those examples of public administration that have had a significant transformational impact. Despite the initial reserve of interviewees, finding such examples was not a difficult task. Rather, with a surfeit of suggestions, the key difficulty was determining what to leave out.

The examples of successful policy documented in this article make it clear the efforts of public servants are making Victoria a better place. Although public servants do not secure a lot of credit for their efforts, these examples make clear that they should.

All those interviewed for this article revealed themselves to be passionate policy enthusiasts. Although they all highlighted examples of successful reforms, all would have preferred that more progress had been made. Above all, the interviewees were united by their passion for the future. For despite the impressive achievements cataloged here, one of the interviewees best summed up the sentiments of her colleagues when she said 'our best work is ahead of us'.

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